INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS SOCIAL AESTHETICS?

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Although the social sciences directed their attention toward the production, circulation, and consumption of art from at least the early twentieth century, the dominant academic discourse on art and aesthetics for a long time has been, and in some quarters continues to be, an expression of neo-Kantian and neo-Humean philosophies. While the details and the value of both Kant's and Hume's aesthetics continue to be debated, it is fair to say that both theories, in different yet related ways, have neglected the ways in which one's location and embeddedness in a particular culture and social milieu affect one's aesthetic judgments, the role that such social location might play in aesthetics, and questions of whether and how social experience might itself be immanent in aesthetic experience.[1] Instead, both traditions have looked to what they consider to be universal human capacities and cross-cultural generalities to elucidate the sources of aesthetic pleasure and judgment. Such a focus on the perceptual and cognitive aspects of aesthetic experience and belief—and, in particular, the attempt to treat them as human capabilities that transcend culture, time, and place—has led to a focus on such issues as the existence or nature of aesthetic connoisseurship and the possible objectivity of aesthetic evaluation, as well as to attempts to isolate a distinctive aesthetic attitude and even a distinctive aesthetic mode of perception. In this respect, such aesthetic theories are atomic in that they elevate individual agents and their mental beliefs and perceptual capacities as the primary concern.[2]

The result is that the historical roots of aesthetics as a distinct field of inquiry has precluded any potential development of a social aesthetics, and this has occurred for two broad reasons. First, the Kantian claims that

"pure" judgments of beauty follow from a disinterested feeling of pleasure, coupled with the purposeless nature of art as art, would seem to rule out of court any consideration of the social in aesthetics. Second, the normative Humean claim that the proper theory of taste entails concurrence of aesthetic judgments among all aesthetic "experts" presumes that aesthetics can and should be neutral with regard to social status, position, history, and function. The influence views such as these had (and in some quarters continue to have) on demarcating the boundaries of the aesthetic are responsible for the absence of any consideration in prior theories both of what a social aesthetics might represent and of the diverse forms it might take. The chapters that follow explore and develop a number of distinct yet mutually resonant formulations of a social aesthetics, a social aesthetics that, in part by virtue of its rejection of the universality implied by this early history, is per force plural and varied. What ties these approaches together is a rejection of the claim, however grounded, that one can or should disentangle the social, in all its varied modalities, from experiences and conceptions of the aesthetic. In this sense, art objects and events are thought to transcend their narrow material, temporal, and spatial boundaries and to participate vitally, richly, and vigorously in the larger socio-material assemblages within which they are created, circulated, and consumed—within which they and the subjects of aesthetic experience that they elicit and encounter together live their lives.[3]

Early aesthetic theories, and subsequent theories indebted to them, have helped to explain much about our aesthetic worlds, including differences and similarities between our beliefs about artworks and their effects on us, as well as our experiences of and interactions with other kinds of objects. Yet at the same time, the failure of such models of aesthetic inquiry to engage from the outset with the social and cultural dimensions of our aesthetic lives has resulted in theories that are peculiarly barren of nuance, unable to understand actual aesthetic attitudes, and blind to how such social relations as those pertaining to class, race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, or nationality, and the histories and power relations in which they are entwined, as well as the socialities animated by art objects and events, inflect aesthetic experience—often in ways that precisely deny that they are so inflected.

Recognition of the powerfully social nature both of aesthetic judgment and of aesthetic experience not only suggests that more than just the philosopher's normal toolkit needs to be brought to bear in the analysis of aesthetics (i.e., the philosopher's concern with conceptual analysis, logical argumentation, and the impact of a given theory on related theories). It

suggests also that sociological, anthropological, and cultural-historical research should inform future investigation into and theorization of the aesthetic (Born 2010c; Bourdieu 1984). Aesthetics as a field of inquiry, in this view, needs to move beyond the individual or atomic and toward the social or molecular, interrogating, for example, such pervasive social and cultural processes as the role of aesthetic experience in the formation of affective alliances (Straw 1991) or aggregations of those affected by art and music (Born 2011). It needs to consider the many ways in which individual aesthetic judgments are influenced by social processes and pressures that may be fluid or rigid and enduring. It needs to address how social entities themselves—social groups, populations, cultural institutions, disciplinary formations, governments—adopt, invent, forge, promote, and/or police certain aesthetic tendencies and positions. And it needs to register and theorize how particular socialities and social relations can themselves "get into," partake in, and animate aesthetic imagination and experience.

In this light, the notion of a "social aesthetics" can be seen *both* as a broadening of the traditional subject matter of aesthetics (i.e., individual beliefs about art objects, the cognitive and perceptual processes behind them, and the ontology of art objects that underlie such attitudes) and, emphatically, as a critique of it. A social aesthetics is, then, less concerned with demarcating a class of aesthetically valuable objects than it is with explaining how and why a given set of objects or experiences—those associated with, say, Beethoven or Bird, Brancusi or Beuys, Beach Boys or Blackalicious—is judged to be valuable, or its value contested, by some social group or other, or is taken to be the entangled locus of social-aesthetic experience. By rejecting what is often seen as a Kantian view of the functionlessness of art, a social aesthetics argues for, and investigates the details of, the many ways in which our interactions with art participate in or serve an array of political orientations and social and cultural processes: from signaling our membership in and commitment to particular social identities (Marxist, African American, queer, and so on) or culturally imagined communities (punk, psytrance, death metal, and so on), to reifying, contesting, or modeling alternatives to existing social formations. These concerns lead the contributors to this book to focus on the aesthetic orientations of entities that are larger than the individual—to examine, for example, the diverse ways in which institutions or elite social groups may codify their power and prestige through certain aesthetic commitments or aesthetically informed practices, but equally the manner in which social groups and collective projects as well as individual artists can develop or promote aesthetic practices that

are intended to counteract prevailing cultural norms, dominant social mores or political discourses, or that may become a locus for enacting alternative social relations.

One might think, therefore, that there are few points of contact between traditional aesthetics and a social aesthetics—that a social aesthetics is concerned with anything but the aesthetic. But this would be a mistake in two ways, as the chapters in this volume attest—first, because a social aesthetics continues to realize the reality and the importance of aesthetic pleasures and displeasures, while recognizing that discussions, theories, and conflicts about aesthetic judgments will at the same time often signal, consciously or unconsciously, either a commitment to or a questioning of given social identifications and political positions; and second, because a social aesthetics questions the utility of the very separation of the categories "aesthetic" and "social" when analyzing the nature of artistic objects and processes and the aesthetic experiences they elicit—a stance most obviously relevant, but not limited, to the performing arts (music, theater, dance, performance art, sound art, and so on).

Far from saying that aesthetic judgments are unimportant, then, a social aesthetics argues that they are much more important and less confined than has been realized by traditional aesthetics, in that they are judgments that we may employ to demarcate ourselves from others, to glorify or vilify others, to help define the communities in which we claim membership and to which we claim allegiance, as well as to imagine and experiment with new socialities and social identifications at the limits of present arrangements. To embrace a social aesthetics, then, is to believe that aesthetics matters in ways far beyond those previously assumed, for a social aesthetics recognizes that our aesthetic pronouncements and embodied experiences are saturated with social meaning, are routinely enrolled to serve multiple social and cultural purposes, and are as much about the subjects of aesthetic experience as they are about aesthetic objects. Indeed, in this sense a social aesthetics both depends on and augurs a relational, historically situated conception of aesthetic subject and object (Born 2009, 80–81; cf. Paddison 1993, 216). At the same time, by arguing that the sensory, perceptual, and embodied modes of experience at the heart of aesthetic theory should be grasped as immanently encultured and social,[4] a social aesthetics ushers in novel and long-overdue means of analyzing aesthetic experiences themselves.

The recognition that the social, broadly construed, is an ineliminable part of aesthetic experience and that we cannot isolate or purify the objects of aesthetic appreciation from their social entanglement serves also to

broaden the class of objects toward which aesthetic theory might be turned. This broadening has been witnessed across the humanities and social sciences since the 1970s, as popular culture and music, noncanonical forms of visual culture, mass-media content, and so-called para-literatures have taken their place within university curricula and in the research activities of scholars across these fields. Indeed, it is these developments that ushered in from the 1970s the new interdisciplinary fields of cultural and media studies. Admittedly, this is a shift that remains unsteady and ambivalent: media and popular-culture texts and artifacts are still not accorded the same status and value in elite academic circles as the objects of the traditional humanities, and admission of interest in any social dimension of culture often remains a trigger for fears and accusations of that grave sin, sociological reductionism. Nonetheless, with these openings, the boundaries of what constitutes an artwork have come to be seen as more porous than previously believed. No longer are art objects thought to consist solely of a distinct class of entities, produced under certain conditions, for certain reasons, and usually by a prescribed class of art creators. This expansion of the range of cultural phenomena deemed worthy of cultural analysis has been accompanied by a recognition of the fluid, often contradictory ways in which social processes, conventions, and norms shape aesthetic objects, just as aesthetic discourses can in turn shape social processes and even sociocultural institutions (Born 1995, 2004). Yet this broadening of the objects of cultural analysis has commonly *not* been accompanied by a concern with the aesthetic per se. Rather, for decades the kinds of textual analysis that prevailed in film, media, and cultural studies took its bearings from ideology critique, certain Foucauldian orientations, psychoanalytic theories, and formal or narrative analysis—theories and methodologies from which questions of the aesthetic are invariably absent. At the time of this writing, for example, the challenge of conceptualizing the aesthetic in relation to media, especially new media, remains at the cutting edge of media studies. Thus, while efforts to characterize the interconnections between the aesthetic and the social *should* have been central to key currents in cultural theory in recent decades—from semiology, Anglo-American cultural studies, and film and media studies to the sociology of culture and analyses of cultural production—they have been halting. From the social-science side, Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of art and culture is indicative,[5] for despite his sustained commitment to theorizing cultural production, Bourdieu (1984) produced mainly a negative critique of aesthetics.[6]

The main exception in this history is the anthropology of art, in which

social and cultural analysis has been accompanied by a conviction that matters of aesthetic and affective experience, as well as "form and the relative autonomy of form" (Morphy and Perkins 2006, 18), lie within its scope (see, e.g., Coote and Shelton 1992; Layton 1991). A great deal of work in the anthropology of art has been concerned with charting indigenous art systems and their aesthetic discourses, often by exploring their difference from Western romantic and modernist idioms. Form and aesthetics, then, have been central problematics, despite continuing controversy about whether the concept of the aesthetic can legitimately be employed cross-culturally as an analytical category.[7]

In parallel with these developments in the academy, since the early 1960s a spate of artistic and musical movements developed—among them Fluxus, happenings, and installation and intermedia art—that drew attention to the ways in which social relations and social situations can participate in aesthetic phenomena or contribute to aesthetic experience, a trajectory that culminated recently in the upsurge of curatorial, art-critical, and art-theoretical writings and debates that erupted around the concept of relational aesthetics.[8] It is in the wake of these movements within art and music over the past half-century that a further step in the conceptual apparatus underpinning a social aesthetics has become necessary, because together these movements foster the recognition not only that art and music are conditioned and shaped by wider social and cultural processes, but also that art and music themselves have the potential both to influence social processes and to put into practice, model, enact, and experiment with novel socialities and social relations of diverse kinds. In this light, recent anthropologies and sociologies of art and music have proposed that the relationship between art or music and the social should be conceptualized in terms of bidirectional influences or mutual mediation (Born 2005, 2011, 2012; DeNora 2003, 2010; Hennion 1993, 2003). In short, just as social (and economic and political) conditions and processes shape art and music, so do art and music shape social (and economic and political) life.

It is worth dwelling a little longer, however, on the historical developments alluded to in the previous paragraph, for the emergence of an array of post-formalist, socially inflected artistic movements since the 1960s went along with a widespread rejection of the very idea of the aesthetic on the part of those propounding what was pointedly termed "anti-aesthetic" art, of which conceptual art is generally taken to be the vanguard (Skrebowski 2009). Indeed, for Peter Osborne (2013, 37), art from the mid-1960s entailed a "struggle over art's relationship to [the] aesthetic," a "campaign . . . at

once anti-institutional and the bearer of an alternative institutionalization, following the temporal logic of artistic avant-gardes." This campaign "so fundamentally transformed the field of practices . . . recognized as 'art' . . . as to constitute a change in art's 'ontology' or very mode of being. The new, postconceptual artistic ontology that was established [was] 'beyond aesthetic'" (37). Against this background, for some commentators, the present swell of interest in relational aesthetics should be understood as a belated, possibly tamed (and perhaps even ironic) recuperation of elements of the earlier, more socially critical stances enunciated by key strands of 1960s and post-1960s art. Hence, Luke Skrebowski (2009) argues compellingly that the systematic conceptual art associated with the artist and theorist Jack Burnham, as well as with Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, and others, should be understood genealogically as a precursor of later socially oriented art movements, in particular what became known as institutional critique,[9] as well as relational aesthetics.

Judith Rodenbeck (2011; see also n. 9) contends, in turn, that today's relational aesthetics and participatory art form part of a genealogy, previously unrecognized, that should encompass not only such ancestors as John Cage's *4′33″* of 1952, Marcel Duchamp's lecture, "The Creative Act" of 1957, and Umberto Eco's concept of the "open work" of 1962, but also, above all, Allen Kaprow's invention of happenings and the advent of the Fluxus movement. Running through Rodenbeck's genealogy are emphases on participation, the everyday, and the "actively critical, experimental, and fundamentally *social*" nature of these art practices (xiii). As she continues, both happenings and Fluxus events were "radically material, immersive, hybrid, and performative; they were funky, amateurish, and [again] fundamentally social. . . . [Moreover] both happenings and Fluxus events were devised as critiques of the dealer-gallery-museum system" (250–51). Indeed, for Rodenbeck, it was these movements and their "engagements with process" that engendered the "twinned performative, immaterial, hybrid projects of conceptual and systems art" (250–51). Benjamin Buchloh (1990) argues similarly that conceptual art originates in an "aesthetics of administration" where, in Skrebowski's (2009, 29) words, "'administration' is understood as a direct mimicry of the operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality." Buchloh traces the "aesthetics of administration" from roots in Joseph Kosuth's conceptual work through its extension in Haacke's and Buren's critiques of "the social institutions from which the laws of positivist instrumentality and the logic of administration emanate in the first place" (Skrebowski 2009, 30). Whatever stance one takes on these complex and en-

tangled genealogies, commentators appear to agree on the amnesia evident in the fact that the earlier era and its "fundamentally social" practices demand a "historical perspective that [the proponents of relational aesthetics have] willfully rejected" (Rodenbeck 2011, 247).

In light of these genealogical rereadings, we might observe that the politically and socially inflected movements from the 1960s to the 1980s—happenings, Fluxus, conceptual art, and post-conceptual developments such as institutional critique—were engaged at the same time in both radically expanding and emptying out, to the extent of its absolute negation, the then prevailing concept of the aesthetic. Given that it did not seem an option to recast the notion of the aesthetic to encompass either the social, participatory, and "lifelike" aspects of 1960s art or its "low theater, cheap entertainment" and carnivalesque (Rodenbeck 2011, 251) qualities, it seems that the term was generally abandoned, along with its formalist and essentialist baggage, rather than revised in that era. Equally striking, however, is the softening evident in a recent return to the notion of the aesthetic in art theory and criticism, perhaps in part because of its neglect by key lineages of cultural theory for decades, a return of the repressed that entails a freeing up and an overcoming of the earlier rigid dualisms in which formalism was equated with the aesthetic and post- or anti-formalism with its negation. No doubt, this book—one of whose key terms, "social aesthetics," originally arose independently of the lineages just outlined[10]—is another, convergent emanation of the wider current interest in re-theorizing the aesthetic for post-formalist and post-conceptual conditions.[11] But the aim of the chapters gathered here is not to rehabilitate or return to old conceptions of the aesthetic or simply to register the bankruptcy of the old terms and dualisms. It is instead to make progressive conceptual leaps toward a radically enlarged, productively denatured conception of the aesthetic that is suited to contemporary practices, as well as to those earlier practices and genealogies that are being recovered by writers like Skrebowski and Rodenbeck—a conception of the aesthetic as immanently social.[12]

A social aesthetics can therefore be seen as expanding the traditional bounds of aesthetics in two counter-movements. It takes into account the social conditions bearing on experiences of and judgments about art objects, including how these conditions inform the creation, dissemination, reception, and import of such judgments. At the same time, a social aesthetics enlarges or dissolves the very boundaries that have previously defined art, musical, and performance processes and events themselves, showing not only how they are mediated by wider social conditions and institutions but

also how they are immanently social and may in turn proffer—or better *em-practise*—novel realms of social experience, new modes of sociality.[13] The domains of art, music, and performance therefore cross-fade with the social, in this way eroding the inflexible categorization of what constitutes aesthetic experience and its art or musical objects characteristic of earlier aesthetic theories. The essays in this collection take both of these directions, sometimes at once. On the one hand, they unpick the social and political conditions bearing on aesthetic experiences, objects, and practices; on the other hand, they direct attention to the social relations and social dynamics immanent in art, musical, and performance works and practices as aesthetic events.

In addition to expounding a social aesthetics, a second theme is central to this collection: that of the relation between a social aesthetics and improvisation. The aforementioned aspects of social aesthetics make it particularly appropriate to an analysis of improvisatory art, since improvisation, regardless of its medium, has often been conceived by both its practitioners and its theorists as being intimately inflected by the social formations in which it is created and as being, in aesthetically relevant ways, a social practice in itself. Improvised art is often created partially as a social commentary—perhaps on an existing art scene, perhaps on a wider set of social or political issues (see, e.g., Heble 2000; Jones 1963; Monson 2007); while, crucially, the artwork itself—the "object of aesthetic appreciation" in traditional aesthetics—entails, more obviously than in the non- or less improvised arts, processes of social interaction. In other words, there are both social and historical reasons and aesthetic reasons for why the improvised arts can be seen as a key conduit for the development of a social aesthetics.[14] First, and with particular regard to improvised music, improvisation is often seen as a response and a corrective to the normative ontology of Western art music, in which experience of the "work" comes to us embedded in a rigid hierarchy descending from composer through performer to audience (Goehr 1992). From this perspective, the very act of improvising enacts an alternative to, and embodies a critique and rejection of, the social relations—the particular musical division of labor—constructed by the Western art music tradition, and is in this critical respect an act not only of social commentary but, potentially, of social experimentation.[15] Of course, one may consider the account of hierarchical relations between composition and improvisation that grounds this analysis both historically mistaken and musically and

conceptually misguided—as, for example, Nicholas Cook does in his chapter in this volume.

Second, and less controversial, group improvisation involves essentially dialogical engagements between the improvisers, so that they are compelled to communicate with one another, all parties receiving, negotiating, responding to, and attempting to create meaningful (musical or performance) utterances and gestures in real time.[16] The precise way this dialogue unfolds has often been portrayed as the primary locus of the aesthetic distinctiveness of improvisation (Monson 1996), but—the pivotal point—the dialogical aesthetic practice is also, immanently, a social interaction. In other words, and most obviously with respect to music (but also, as several chapters aver, in the other performance arts), improvisation cannot but empractise or manifest a social aesthetics. Again, while music-making techniques that do not foreground improvisation can themselves enact or inflect social processes, and invariably also involve dialogue among performers (Schutz 1964), differences in degree perhaps do, in this case, result in a difference in kind. Music-making practices centered on scores and their interpretation, and powered by individual author-composers, have for decades attracted the primary attention of the disciplines of musicology, music theory, and music analysis, generating copious textual exegeses from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Not until the improvisatory arts and their associated social aesthetics receive sustained attention of the sort initiated by the chapters that follow will we be in a position from which critically to judge how and to what degree the improvisatory arts differ from the non-improvisatory, and what sort of distinction, if any, can be drawn between the social entanglement of and the socialities engendered by these two meta-artistic formations.[17]

The essays in this collection speak to and complement one another in assorted ways, from obvious affinities such as the art form they investigate or the theoretical paradigms they use, through the forms of mediation they examine or the particular points of contact between the social and the aesthetic on which they focus. All of the contributors are aware of the dangers that arise from the very outset in discussing improvisation, whose definition and limits remain contested.[18] Rather than attempt to define improvisation in any pure or essential terms, all of the essays identify an improvisational moment or aspect of the practices they examine. In this sense, they are all acutely aware that the very notion of improvisation is itself con-

tested ground—aesthetically and socially—and that distinct practitioners and communities, with their particular histories and concerns, characterize and theorize improvisation differently. What emerges is a wide-ranging series of accounts not just of how the social and the aesthetic relate within the context of particular improvisatory arts, but also of how the very notion of an improvisatory art is a product of specific aesthetic and social conditions—conditions that often pull in contradictory directions and that may themselves be the sites of potent contestation.

Attempts to offer a definitive account of improvisation quickly encounter the very different senses that the term has accrued in relation to particular media and art forms, their cultures of production, and their communities of practice. Improvisation in the cinema, for example, may be taken to center on the activity of actors, of technicians (such as those controlling cameras or sound-recording devices), or of audiences, or on those elements of everyday life (such as crowds or moving vehicles) whose behavior, captured on film, is unplanned and unanticipated. In the visual arts, abstract expressionism in general, and action painting more specifically, is often said to be paradigmatic of improvisation, while in music jazz is usually considered the form that most obviously brings improvisation to the fore. Yet the connections here between the cultures of improvisation at play are far from straightforward. In the popular imagination, Jackson Pollock's middle-period drip paintings are said to be visual analogues of bebop, with its casting aside of many harmonic rules, its free invention of melody, and its reckless energy.[19] These features of be-bop are often seen as paradigmatic of the emphasis on personal agency in jazz improvisation, the fact that jazz solos are a product of the improviser's own decisions and are an expression of his or her individual creative voice. Yet at the same time, drip painting by its very nature breaks the intentional bonds between artist and canvas, as the precise pattern of paint is to a large degree a result of chance. So improvisation in jazz is understood as a highly personal and intentional practice, while action painting is analyzed as improvisational yet lacking this grounding in artistic intentionality—in fact, as rejecting it.

It is, then, the differences in how the term "improvisation" may be employed, and the ways in which practices, discourses, and cultures of improvisation diverge or are in tension, that are of greatest interest, since they point to the radically contingent nature of improvisation as it is understood and empractised, and as it has developed historically in relation to specific artistic media. Thus, in jazz, improvisatory elements are commonly taken to be grounded in the music's highly intentional nature and its embeddedness

in and continuation of a particular musical history, while in abstract expressionism, both intentionality and history are downplayed with an emphasis instead on the unconscious and the act of creation. Neither account is false, but any attempt to place them both under some unifying concept is bound to obscure more than it illuminates—at the same time as ignoring actual artistic and social practices and discourses. In attending to these traditions, we learn more about the historically path-dependent nature of such practices and discourses of improvisation—notably, why jazz has been thought to be improvisatory, why action painting was seen as a painterly cognate to jazz, and how a particular school of free improvisation problematizes these connections—than we reveal about any sort of essence of improvisation applicable across media, art forms, and cultures. At this point, we turn to an overview of the chapters, grouped according to key themes and affinities in analysis and outlook.

Part I: The Social and the Aesthetic

In distinctive ways, the four chapters in the book's opening part all address improvisation and social aesthetics primarily in relation to music—or, in one case, music and machines. Improvisation studies in the field of music labor under the long history of a musicology that has been directed almost exclusively toward Western art music, as well as fixated primarily on the analysis of orthodox musical scores, and the inevitable Platonism concerning musical works that follows.[20] The substance or content of music is equated with music's notatable or scoreable parameters, and as a corollary the aesthetic properties of music have by and large been assumed to be exhausted by those properties that can be scored.[21] Improvisation has invariably ended up defined negatively: as a musical practice lacking characteristics of composed music.[22] The rise of both the New Musicology and popular music studies in the 1980s, with their common engagement with the social relations and political circumstances in which music is produced and received, signaled a willingness to turn scholarly attention toward so-called popular and vernacular musics.

In this historical light, from multiple directions within the study of cultural production, Georgina Born (2010c) has observed, we find calls for a theoretical rethinking of the relationship between art and/or music and the social. Her chapter opens by remarking how difficult it has proved, nonetheless, to develop an approach adequate to conceptualizing how the social enters into the aesthetic operations of both music and art; indeed, music and

art, she argues, set some of the most general and obdurate interdisciplinary challenges to the humanities and social sciences in this regard, and improvisation poses them particularly acutely. In parallel, Born notes a crisis within anthropological and social theory over the past two decades centered on the need to reconceptualize the social—or "sociality"—itself, suggesting that attending to music and art can advance these wider debates focused on retheorizing the social. Born then clarifies a number of ways in which the social is put into practice and conceptualized in several lineages of contemporary art practice and commentary, from the relational aesthetics of Nicholas Bourriaud (2002), through the experimental institutional interventions of the Artist Placement Group, to the avowedly activist nature of socially engaged art. She follows the art theorist Claire Bishop (2004) in her important challenge to Bourriaud: as Bishop asks, if art is engaged in producing social relations, then the question is, "What types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?" In this way, Born highlights the need to develop conceptual tools adequate to the task of disentangling and identifying the distinctive forms of sociality produced by art and musical practices so as to avoid their elision, foster a more acute appreciation of both their singularity and their mutual interrelations, and enable fertile comparisons to be drawn between contemporary art and improvised music.

Turning to music, Born shows how the primary way in which a social aesthetics has been identified is in relation to the immediate "microsocialities" of musical practice and performance, which tend to be idealized and to occlude several additional ways that music, and the aesthetic experiences that it engenders, mediate and are mediated by social processes. To advance beyond the preoccupation with music's microsocialities, in the main body of the chapter Born proposes an analytical framework centered on four planes of the social mediation of music. She then takes this framework to improvised music, in which the articulation of the four planes is manifest in richly reticulate socialities, while drawing comparison between the varieties of social aesthetics in contemporary art and those evident in improvised music. Born addresses two improvised music ensembles to exemplify the modes of analysis opened up by her framework: the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), an African American musicians' collective founded in Chicago in 1965, and, particularly, the practices of one of its core groups, the Art Ensemble of Chicago; and the Feminist Improvising Group, an experimental, all-woman European ensemble working at the borders of improvised music and performance art founded in London in 1977 (in which Born herself played cello and bass guitar). In an era in which post-formalist

music, art, and interdisciplinary practices are vastly expanding the very nature and definition of "art," "music," "performance," and "work," Born suggests, it is imperative to develop subtler categories of analysis with regard to how variously the social enters into and transforms, and may in turn be transformed by, the aesthetic.

In chapter 2, Nicholas Cook assails the still common notion that improvisation and work performance should be conceived as totally opposed "others," showing that a focus on performance as a social phenomenon can reveal their similarities and how they are, in effect, interpenetrating practices. Taking Corelli's Violin Sonatas as a case study, he argues that there is no categorical distinction between the performance of works and improvisation: all score-based performance involves the deconstruction, or situated interpretation, of preexisting structures, while, conversely, all improvisation involves reference to, or the elaboration of, preexisting schemata. One result of this is that the notated musical work is itself revealed to be a socially and historically contingent construction that emerges out of the interactions of musicians whose collective creativity produces the meaning seen retroactively to reside in the musical work. The consequence of this analysis is to relocate the generator of aesthetic experience from the supposedly inherent qualities of musical works to the social interactions that constitute their performances as such interactions are orchestrated by scores. Meaning emerges from the only partially predictable engagements between individuals, historically conditioned circumstances, and an open range of stimuli or signifiers that may be auditory, kinesthetic, visual, or cultural—or, indeed, that may belong, in principle, to any humanly perceptible medium.[23] Aesthetic ideologies, Cook contends, are what power the false dichotomies set up between improvisation and work performance, just as they overlook the socialities at play in musical work performance, instead concentrating narrowly on the features of scores. Only once we return performance to the center of aesthetic analysis, even when considering Western art music, according to Cook, will we be in a position to compare and contrast the socialities at play in both improvisational and work-performance settings and, in particular, to recognize commonalities between these forms of social aesthetics.

Chapter 3, by Ingrid Monson, asks us to guard against another sort of a priori, generalizing assumption—namely, that the relationship between improvised music and political movements for black equality in the United States is easily transferred to other improvising communities concerned with issues of cultural identity and politics. Her chapter takes a compara-

tive perspective on the relationship between improvisation, the aesthetic, and the social by contrasting the development of an Afro-modernist aesthetic politics in American jazz improvisation of the 1950s and 1960s with the concept and process of *sensibilisation* in the contemporary musical aesthetics of Mali. Both musical traditions are highly improvisational and virtuosic, but each articulates the connections between social, ethical, religious, and musical currents in different ways. In American jazz of the 1950s and 1960s, the linking of aesthetics and the social involved the connection of explicitly modernist aesthetic values—among them originality, formal experimentation, and vanguardism—to the political and cultural struggle for civil rights and black power in a white-majority nation. In Mali, the idea of sensibilisation as an important and valorized activity on the part of popular artists involves the imperative to educate broad audiences about major issues of social, political, ethical, and medical concern through lyrics and performance styles that raise awareness through a combination of contemporary information and traditional modalities of expression. Rather than take a critical stance on nationalism, many Malian artists give it a positive orientation by exhorting the populace to place their skills and labor in the service of developing the country and its international profile. Race was the primary social formation examined and articulated in the social aesthetics of American jazz in the 1950s and 1960s; gender, health, and economic aspirations provide the central themes articulated by the social aesthetics of contemporary Mali.

Monson's comparative analysis is salutary in showing how the aesthetics of improvisation can mediate a variety of relationships to the social, as well as diverse political priorities. It also warns against assuming at the outset what such a relationship might be. Moreover, Monson's essay productively anatomizes two classic types of the relationship between the aesthetic and the social: in the modernist terms in which aesthetic gestures are understood to be inherently negational of the larger social and political order, and in the "functional" terms in which long-valued performance idioms are taken to be the bearers or carriers of a wider, positive, and transformative politics.

Taken together, Cook's and Monson's essays serve as useful guides for anyone studying improvised music, warning against assuming from the outset improvisation's unique and pure status—itself often a product of romantic or essentialist accounts of improvisation's emancipatory political potential—and reminding us that careful historical and ethnographic research on particular scenes and eras of improvisation are necessary if we are to avoid

a "one size fits all" account of the social aesthetics of improvisation. Born's chapter, in turn, offers a rich blueprint for future research by urging us to attend to how the four planes of social mediation that she identifies enter into social-aesthetic experience. Her framework also highlights the distinctive ways in which the multifaceted socialities enacted by improvised practices both operate within particular social, cultural, and historical conditions and have the potential strenuously to contribute to their transformation.

In chapter 4, George Lewis adds another crucial dimension by raising the need for a detailed and nuanced historical account of the relationships between improvisation, social aesthetics, and the variable status of the human within assemblages of people and machines. While the dominant drift in studies of technology-based artistic expression has often been in the direction of a dehumanization, in which people come to be seen as nodes in networked relations, Lewis traces the countervailing tendency to endow machines with characteristics that are conventionally human. The call, in certain computer-music improvisation practices, to "let the network play" expresses the conviction that machines themselves possess attributes conventionally regarded as human, such as subjectivity, affectivity, autonomy, and individuality—indeed, that networked machines should be conceived of as "quasi-subjects." Lewis's genealogy of these practices challenges the long-standing, almost unquestioned humanism of theories of improvisation, while also participating in the broader enterprise, observable across a broad swath of recent writing in aesthetics, of rewriting the history of relational aesthetics. For critic-historians such as Bishop, Bourriaud's account of relational aesthetics is insufficiently attentive to conceptual and post-conceptual art practices from the 1960s onward; but Lewis's corrective finds a different point of departure. Key ideas about the "sociality" of artistic expression may be found, Lewis suggests, in landmark works that rethink the relationship between humans and machines. These works include the cybernetics of Gregory Bateson and Norbert Weiner, and the insights of Gordon Pask into the ways in which machines learn. They include also such works as the Little Computer People experiments of Rich Gold and David Crane, in which the interactions between humans and computers are marked by attention and affection rather than primarily by instrumental transactions from which any sense of social relations and human mutuality are absent. While the overarching direction in studies of human-computer interaction has been toward imagining forms of shared consciousness, Lewis's richly textured history points to the ideal of a common human-machine sociality analogous to that which is often claimed for practices of musical improvisation.

Part II: Genre and Definition

In traditional philosophical aesthetics, categories of art such as "painting" or "sculpture" affect the aesthetic primarily by establishing properties that are considered standard, variable, or counter-standard for members of that category, and it is the particular combination of such properties that determines the aesthetic value of the artwork in question.[24] Yet such categories are often presented as if they were determined solely by consideration of the media at play—for example, paint applied in two dimensions, sound, or three-dimensionally sculpted solids—and the specificity of the categories is deemed to stop at the level of such media. The reasons for this approach in traditional aesthetics are complex, but much headway can be made in understanding them once it is realized that this project is at its heart ontological and a direct outgrowth of other historical taxonomic enterprises that also focused on the materiality and gross form of the entities under consideration—whether they were zoological categories or the periodic table. In this approach, the autonomy of the various arts, and the hierarchical relationships assumed to exist between them, were considered to be based on the medium associated with each art form and the unique potential for crafting each medium that they afforded.

Genre theory, which initially emerged out of a similar program in relation to the literary arts (Frow 2005), came with time to shed its natural scientific and taxonomic ontological skin. From the early 1980s, particularly under the influence of film theory (Altman 1981, 1987, 1996; Neale 1980, 1990), the analysis of genre developed in less formalist directions and became increasingly focused on how genre categories are themselves intimately entangled in social processes, from the production and marketing operations of the media and culture industries and their attempted construction of reliable audiences, to the responses of actual viewers—where the latter process can entail both the reproduction of existing social identity formations and the forging of new coalitions or articulations between such social formations (Brackett 2005, 2016; Born 2005, 2011). Commitment to a certain artistic, literary, or musical genre (abstract expressionism, free verse, death metal) can be understood, then, both as expressing a constellation of social commitments and as partially constitutive of such commitments.

In this light, the chapters by David Brackett and Eric Lewis examine the dual aesthetic and social processes at work in the constitution and evolution of musical genres, investigating, in particular, the social dimensions of disputes about genre—dimensions often obscured by the overtly aes-

thetic language in which they are conducted. Brackett uncovers the complex history of the creation and reception of what may appear to be just a "novelty item" in Count Basie's catalogue (although it was his biggest hit): the track "Open the Door, Richard!" By examining the history of Basie's version alongside that of others, Brackett reveals a series of complex social and political battles that were set in motion concerning the whole notion of "popular music" and who could, or should, lay claim to this meta-genre. As Brackett argues, genres are invariably embroiled in plays of power and prestige, struggles in which social relations and aesthetics are intertwined but in which the evolving connections between the social and the aesthetic, as they fuel the formation and transformation of genres, are rarely publicly acknowledged. He uncovers how the concept of improvisation was understood in the particular historical situation surrounding "Open the Door, Richard!" and how improvisation figured into the distinctions made between different genres of music and their social connotations. In this way, Brackett establishes the often hidden ways in which the real or perceived presence or absence of improvisation can influence the social meanings attributed to, as well as the social constituencies reached by, particular musical genres.

Brackett emphasizes that what was at stake in the "battle" between popular music and jazz in the genre constellations of this era concerned at its core issues of racial identity and of the representation of nonwhite others in music—issues that turned on and stirred up the inflammatory perception that music encoded social identities and social relationships. This is a theme picked up by Lewis, in chapter 6, in his discussion of the practices, reception, and commentary surrounding the music of the AACM in Paris in 1969. The Association's works were often received against a backdrop of black radical politics and interpreted in such terms. Lewis shows how the members of the AACM refused to limit their music to membership of one musical genre; indeed, going further, he argues that they consciously problematized the genre membership of their own works, in this way forcing critics and audiences to question the genre designations at play. By doing so, Lewis contends, the members of the AACM were "aesthetically thickening" their works, while at the same time guarding against any assumption that there was a single social (antiracist) agenda behind their music. Lewis therefore extends Brackett's claim that genres bring social relations and musical sounds into mobile interrelations by suggesting that the AACM transformed the socially charged debates about the genre membership of their music into an aesthetic value. In this way, the AACM members took a stand against both aesthetic and social essentialism, as well as against any social reductionism

in the interpretation of their music and practice. Arguably, Lewis suggests, they were at the same time resisting and articulating alternatives to the forms of racial essentialism to which they were often subjected.

Chapter 7, by Darren Wershler, adopts a quite different approach to genre in the contemporary arts. It addresses what is at stake in the contestation of genres and, particularly, those that foreground improvisation, arguing that such contestation comes focally to how the nature and location of creativity are understood. Wershler asks whether there is such a thing as "uncreative" improvisation, and if so, how it would operate. Pointing to the pervasive backdrop of modernist assumptions concerning the nature and value of creativity in the arts, Wershler suggests that uncreative improvisation may well be able to animate and articulate social critique more effectively than those kinds of improvisation that continue to take creativity as the hallmark of the artistically transgressive.

To develop his arguments, Wershler focuses on the work of the writer and artist Kenneth Goldsmith, particularly in his capacity as a disc jockey for the free-form New Jersey radio station WFMU. It has become increasingly common for critics, theorists, and practitioners to invoke the DJ as the paradigmatic authorial figure in contemporary culture, a figure taken to engage in practices of selection and combination of preexistent elements from the archive as a wellspring of new cultural forms (e.g. Bourriaud 2005; cf. Oswald 2006). What often remain uninterrogated, however, are a number of modernist formulations lying behind this valorization, in particular the view that creativity, novelty, and even "true art" are the inherently valuable results of the DJ's inspired curations and manipulations. Wershler argues that since the 1950s, when business culture began to claim creativity for itself, the arts have seen a corresponding movement into the deliberately boring and the uncreative. Against this background, he suggests, novelty and creativity can no longer signify in the manner that modernist thinking presupposes. Wershler examines a variety of Goldsmith's on-air performances in light of his writings on the subject of uncreativity to reexamine key terms in the discourse around improvisation and creativity. Goldsmith's oeuvre is shown to be worthy of consideration precisely because it works explicitly with categories that many practitioners and critics extolling the virtues of improvisation and improvisatory creativity exclude: the uncreative and the useless. Goldsmith's work, Wershler contends, intervenes in the ways in which ideas of the creative and creativity circulate within contemporary culture, moving between discourses that are, variously, legal, entrepreneurial, technology-centered, and aesthetic in character.

Part III: Sociality and Identity

The third part of the book is concerned with two dimensions of a social aesthetics: on the one hand, with the particular types of social relations that take shape in collaborative improvised practices as they relate to—and potentially critique or reimagine—the standard social arrangements, or division of labor, and the dominant institutional forms that support art, film, or music making; and, on the other hand, with how certain lived categories of social identity and social difference—those relating, for example, to sexuality, gender, race, or class—"get into" improvised practices and may also be transformed by those practices. The chapters therefore engage not only with issues of social identity as they are mediated by an aesthetics of improvisation, but also with improvisation as a locus for the generation of social relations—including the inherent potential for experimentation, and for the cultivation of interpersonal empathy, in those relations.

In chapter 8, Lisa Barg begins her essay on Billy Strayhorn, best known as the longtime arranger for Duke Ellington, with a fruitful question: "What socialities are involved in the aesthetic practices of arranging?" As her analysis shows, improvisation may serve as a potent site for the articulation of historically marginalized identities, in part through the forms of intimacy and negotiation that improvisation typically necessitates. Barg focuses on Strayhorn's works as a vocal arranger, arguing that these collaborations both paralleled and articulated his status as a gay, but largely closeted, African American man. Strayhorn's dissident sexual identity required that he work in the shadows, as a collaborator, in a distanced but empathetic space from which his musical voice could merge with and give shape to the voices of others. The very act of arranging, it might be suggested, is itself a difficult, almost a "queer," practice, given traditional musicological categories, inasmuch it situates or insinuates itself ambiguously within the composer-conductor-performer division of labor central to Western art music. Barg shows how the "queerness" of arranging as an aesthetic enterprise, particularly given its ambiguous relationship to both the scored and the improvisatory elements of Ellington's music, marked it as an ideal social location from which to enact queer labor.

Strayhorn's collaborations with singers in the activity of vocal arranging opened up spaces of interpersonal dialogue, but they were not (or not always) spaces of transparent and full communication. As Barg shows, Strayhorn's own "queer" identity moved between presence and absence, manifesting itself subtly in musical inflections and transgressions. While the

music that resulted from these partnerships is easily read as proof of successful collaborations, it is more usefully grasped as having been produced through complex negotiations in which Strayhorn's "sonic empathy" was key even if it often went unrecognized.

In her afterword to the anthology *Black Popular Culture*, Michele Wallace (1998, 345) offered a dissent from the ways in which music had come fully to circumscribe what she called "the parameters of intellectual discourse in the African-American community." Among other things, Wallace called for greater attention to the histories and accomplishments of African American visual cultures. In chapter 9, Tracey Nicholls does not set music against the visual arts. Instead, she centers her essay on the role played by improvisation in the often overlooked visual-art criticism of the African American cultural theorist bell hooks. Nicholls argues that hooks's theory of the visual arts is grounded in an ethics of love that is informed by her appreciation of jazz and of the plurality of creative voices that improvisatory arts such as jazz both presume and place in dialogue.

One key reason for the neglect of hooks's writings on art, Nicholls suggests, is her emphasis on the aesthetics of ordinary craft objects, often created by individuals who stand outside the institutionally sanctioned art worlds. From the perspective of dominant art discourses, such individuals and their art are marked as deviant. The art objects they produce are often viewed as "mere" arrangements, put together to serve practical purposes (e.g., quilts); such art objects therefore occupy an ambiguous space between that of autonomous artworks and wholly functional things. The improvisatory, in this kind of art making, is most evident in the use of discarded, fragmented, and everyday materials. For Nicholls, drawing on hooks, salvage art, mosaic forms, and graffiti art all involve ways of drawing on everyday environments in order to bring aesthetic value to such environments and thus participate in processes of empowerment. Moreover, the vernacular space of art making is one in which the possibility of participation is extended to ever increasing numbers of people, refuting the social and cultural closures inherent in the institutionalization of the arts and music, just as the ongoing improvisation of novel and hybrid artistic forms challenges the exclusionary conceptions of artistic legitimacy that prevail in the art world.

Complementing the previous two chapters, chapter 10, by Marion Froger, examines an often forgotten moment in the history of improvisatory art practices. In the early 1960s, the filmmakers who made up the French New Wave turned to improvisation in a number of ways. To arrive on a film set (or a real street) with a camera and a minimal script was to leave oneself open

to the unpredictable unfolding of real-life events, which filmmakers might follow or in which they might intervene. In this respect, the fiction films of the New Wave drew on principles of unscripted spontaneity that had already proved revolutionary in the field of documentary film. At the same time, by allowing actors to improvise their dialogue, filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard produced situations in which the relationships between characters on screen developed through processes of adjustment and negotiation similar to those that mark relationships in real life.

As Froger makes clear in her detailed study of responses to these films, improvisation raised the question of social relations at multiple levels. For craftspeople working in the mainstream film industry, improvisation represented a challenge to long-standing protocols and trade union agreements in which professional roles were clear, dialogue and camera angles were planned in advance, and a polished quality was the ultimate objective. With their disregard for such protocols, the improvising filmmakers of the New Wave were viewed widely as self-indulgent, privileged upstarts. The changes in profilmic practice were, then, dual: improvisation on screen engendered novel social relations, which in turn fueled, and were entangled with, aesthetic changes; while experimentation with professional roles also amounted to a challenge to the established division of labor in filmmaking. At the same time, audiences might respond to improvisatory practices in at least two distinct ways. From one perspective, improvising was a gesture of generosity on the part of filmmakers, who invited viewers to enter into something akin to their own social worlds and to watch intimate relationships take shape before the camera. From another perspective, improvisation was a gesture of disdain toward audiences, who found themselves excluded from the seemingly frivolous interactions of an in-group accused of lacking any sense of professional or artistic responsibility. Froger shows how the controversies and critical dissension that surrounded New Wave films were often based on judgments of filmmakers' relationship to society at large. Had these filmmakers produced a new, inclusive cinema that simultaneously challenged decaying industry structures and outdated aesthetic codes while embracing audiences in new and democratic ways? Or were they simply the bearers of a generational self-centeredness marked by contempt for audiences and disdain for a craft and a profession seen as having exhausted itself?

Part IV: Performance

The three chapters in this final part of the collection all focus in distinctive ways on how a social aesthetics might be conceived primarily in relation to performance. In addition, Susan Kozel and Winfried Siemerling both address how new technologies, when employed in the creation of art, can mediate both aesthetic and social change. More specifically, they demonstrate how social limitations often seen to be inherent in the very technology at hand can be transcended in aesthetically productive ways via diverse improvisatory gestures. Siemerling's chapter focuses on the practice of "turntablism" and, in particular, the use of hip hop by the Canadian poet and writer Wayde Compton to channel and rearticulate local black history and diasporic subjectivities. Siemerling argues that Compton's precise ways of employing turntablism and the spoken word operate both as a mode of performance and as a means by which to present and remix very specific aspects of black British Columbian history in nuanced terms. He contends that this is the case despite the common complaint against turntablism specifically, and against bricolage art more generally, that such cut-and-paste methods occlude cultural specificity and lack the ability to mediate any content with real cultural depth and specificity. Siemerling shows how Compton manages to transcend such charges through his highly improvisatory use of turntablism grounded in the signifying tradition,[25] in which repetition with a signal difference is considered a crucial means by which personal and community narratives can be both retained and modified to speak to new, pressing social concerns. In this way, the chapter enables us to understand Compton's artistic choices as contributions to a transformative, improvisational social aesthetics that is transcultural in its reach yet articulates a very particular and local sense of social identity and community.

In chapter 12, Kozel addresses how a social aesthetics attuned to the senses might be developed in relation to contact improvisation in dance, with particular attention to touch—between audience members and performers, and between dancers as mediated through mobile technologies. Kozel's interest is in interpreting the aesthetics of dance improvisation through a variant of phenomenology to reveal "the dynamic ebb and flow of states of encounter of all the participants," in which everyone is, in some sense, a performer. To do this, Kozel focuses on the interplay between improvisation and intercorporeality in two dance events—one of them, IntuiTweet, entailing reflexive analysis of a collaborative dance and media project, employing the networked digital space of Twitter and SMS messaging, in which she was

herself involved. With reference to Rancière's (2009a) framing of aesthetics as a reconfiguration of perception, as well as Derrida's (2005) interest in the place of the anaesthetic in the aesthetic, Kozel highlights how the interactions immanent in these dance improvisations point to the social as innately inter-corporeal—where, through the late work of Merleau-Ponty, inter-corporeality is understood as a field of multiple embodied exchanges.

The first dance event, *Small Acts*, centered on "undecided situations" constructed for audience members as they followed dancers moving through a series of rooms and corridors, producing ambiguous transformations with the effect that audience members shifted between being spectators and participants. Through this fluid movement—across spaces and roles—the rhythm of the event was infused, Kozel suggests, with collective waves of affective anticipation. The fabric of aesthetic experience derived, she argues, from the improvised, anticipatory movements through diverse spaces of performers and audience, so that those who "watched" also contributed their own improvised movements to the event. In contrast, IntuiTweet, an experimental collaboration between three dancer-researchers, points to how social media can enhance and choreograph a social aesthetics. Tasked with noticing moments of their own "movement intuition," the dancers used Twitter to convey to one another what they were sensing and how they were moving at any given moment. When a tweet was received as a text, the dancer was expected to improvise the movement received, enacting a shift in bodily state or repositioning of limbs, and then to respond. This generated a flurry of movement messages, an asynchronous flow of kinesthetic exchanges afforded by the convergence between dance improvisation and social networking. While the contact improvisation in *Small Acts* consisted of inter-corporeal improvisation between audience and performers, in IntuiTweet it was fostered by movement translated into and disseminated as texts and then retranslated and reenacted through a distributed network of bodies. These improvisations, Kozel contends, offer an understanding of the anaesthetic not as the opposite of the aesthetic but as a field of less categorizable qualities of social interaction; at the same time, in Rancière's terms, they create and re-create bonds between people, giving rise to new modes of confrontation or participation.

In contrast to Siemerling and Kozel, Zoë Svendsen is concerned in chapter 13 with the contributions of improvisation to the socialities immanent in theatrical work, and thereby to a social aesthetics—given that theater is "always already relational, always rehearsing the possibility of social communities." She observes that the socialities produced by the spatial and lit-

erary codes of the theater are rarely remarked on by theater scholars. She sets out, however, from Michael Fried's infamous call to "defeat theater," since for Fried theater—with its acknowledgment of co-presence in the relation between artwork and audience—is an affront to "modernist sensibility." It is precisely against such a view, Svendsen argues, that a great deal of contemporary theatrical practice has been predicated on theater's inherent "doubleness": "its capacity not only for representing social relations, but also for shaping the [actual] sociality of the occasion." Svendsen traces the history of changing conventions of the social relations of theater, noting, for example, how George Devine, the founder of the Royal Court in London, promoted Friedian artistic autonomy, denying the permeability of social and aesthetic practices specific to theater. But in parallel, she notes those many movements—"from the anti-institutional avant-garde practices of Surrealists, Dadaists, and Futurists, to Brechtian epic, to the socialist theater companies that took theater directly 'to the people'" in Britain between the 1960s and the 1980s—that have experimented in diverse ways with direct social engagements between writers, actors, and audiences.

This history forms the backdrop to Svendsen's reflexive analysis of the place of improvisation within dramaturgical practice today. She notes that although improvisation plays a key role in theater as a socially oriented practice, its provenance is unclear. In some accounts, all acting is taken to be improvisatory; in others, improvisation is equated with values of intuition, immediacy, or spontaneity; in yet others, improvisation stands as a supposed bulwark against theater's reification and commodification. Three case studies allow Svendsen to convey a range of ways in which improvisation can enliven the social aesthetics of theater. The first, *Discombobulator*, highlights through improvisation the violence of a traditional proscenium-arched theatrical space that frames every action as spectacle. The performance thematizes entrapment within an aesthetic structure and the limitations of human agency while inviting the ready, empathic collusion of the audience. *Four Men and a Poker Game* demonstrates, in turn, how improvisation in performance can collapse the distance implicitly posited by the theatrical frame between fictional time and real-time experience in the venue, allowing the performance to converge with actual social engagements between audience and performers. *3rd Ring Out: Rehearsing the Future* goes further, dramatizing the porousness of social and aesthetic relations in theatrical process. Premised on the uncanny parallels between the scenarios provided to the civil servant "players" of nuclear war exercises and the instructions given to actors when improvising in rehearsal, the project

rehearses the ethical dilemmas likely to be thrown up by the crises brought about by climate change. Combining performance, game, simulation, and artistic event, *3rd Ring Out* invites audience members both to encounter and to improvise around these ethical dilemmas. The piece elides artistic and social practice in the production of an emergency planning-style event; through research, discussion, and voting, participants shape both dramatic narrative and potential human futures, while the sometimes tense and volatile socialities that arise during the performance problematize the equation of participation with the creation of "community" that is so central to Bourriaud's relational aesthetics.

As a group, the three chapters in part IV reveal the varied, subtle, and often reflexive ways in which new performance techniques traversing theater, dance, music, poetry, and new media propose or presume new relationships between the social and the aesthetic. The chapters point, as well, to the productive role played by improvisation as the historical divisions between artistic disciplines are challenged and as new assemblages of technologies and people are brought into being.

Across different artistic disciplines, improvisation has meant different things, followed distinct (though sometimes intersecting) historical trajectories, and been theorized with varying degrees of complexity. If this seems like an opportune time in which to pursue a more integrated account of improvisation, it is in part because paradigms of performance and improvisation have become so prevalent in social theory today, just as present-day cultural theory is also preoccupied with a set of issues whose pertinence for thinking about improvisation seems clear. Such issues include the status of the creative gesture, the mutability of the performing body, scrutiny of the work concept, and the multiple ways in which social relations may be artistically, dramaturgically, and musically located, constructed, or (re)imagined. Concerns such as these are at the heart of productive new ways of thinking about improvisation, but as this volume demonstrates, they have also animated the common project of a social aesthetics, which necessarily grapples with their fertile entanglement. This entanglement is a thread woven through the chapters in this book, inviting further dialogue and both attesting to and calling for the creation of new modes and spaces of inter- and trans-disciplinary inquiry—in particular, across the humanities and social sciences.

Notes

1. It will not concern us here whether such critiques of Kantian aesthetics are accurate. The single most influential Kantian text concerning aesthetics is his third and final critique, *The Critique of Judgment* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), published in 1790. A potted history of the reception and critique of Kant with respect to the aesthetic issues central to this volume would have one focus on the distinction Kant draws, but does not always flag, between free (*frei*) and adherent (*anhangend*) beauty (see esp. section 16 of *The Critique*), and his focus on free beauty, coupled with his claim that music is an example of an art that manifests free beauty. For discussions of this distinction, see Kalar 2006; Lorand 1989; Scarré 1981; Zuckert 2007. This distinction, which suggests a purely formalist aesthetics, was later taken up by Eduard Hanslick, whose influential formalist aesthetics of music in turn became a model for later formalist aesthetics applied to visual art: see Hanslick 1986. For Kant's influence on Hanslick, see Kivy 2009. Kant's theory suggests to many that abstract nonrepresentational art also manifests free beauty and so is open to formalist aesthetic analysis. Of course, the rise of formalist aesthetics more generally, to which social aesthetics in part aspires to be a response and a corrective, parallels the growth of nonrepresentational art as it became characteristic of modernism. A related point of criticism is the Kantian belief, the details of which are open to assorted interpretations, that aesthetic judgments have normative force—that when one makes an aesthetic judgment, it is with the conviction that others should share it—and that, in some sense or other, such judgments have an objective weight. While much philosophical aesthetics in the Anglo-American tradition continues to grapple with Kantian aesthetics, even when critical of it either wholly or in part, Continental philosophical traditions have tended to reject the Kantian paradigm. Indeed, at the risk of overgeneralizing, it is fair to say that Continental aesthetics is unified by its rejection of the Kantian paradigm and, in particular, what is seen as its failure to investigate critically the actual lived conditions under which aesthetic judgments are made, and thus a failure to recognize and note the centrality of the social and political dimensions of our aesthetic lives, which may indeed partially constitute them. Taking such failures seriously has led to the development of aesthetic theories that have emerged hand in hand with new theoretical paradigms in sociological, anthropological, and cultural theory (along with new theories in art history), and that are all the richer for this. For these reasons, among others, anti-Kantian aesthetics tend to focus on how our aesthetic lives operate as parts of greater systems and to argue that the constellations of relations we stand in with respect to other individuals, groups, institutions, and social or political processes must be part of any useful aesthetic inquiry. Perhaps the single most developed criticism of a Kantian paradigm, and one that indicates the productivity of empirical research into the structures and dynamics of the consumption of art and culture, is Bourdieu 1984. In his lengthy introduction, Bourdieu makes clear the anti-Kantian nature of his work and what he sees as shortcomings in the Kantian program.

2. This critical observation has parallels with criticisms of methodological individualism in the social sciences, in that methodological individualism takes social and cultural processes to be explicable primarily in terms of the summation of individual actions and intentions.

3. One important reference for adopting such a general stance in regard to matter and materiality is Bennett 2010. In this volume, we add to this general stance, however, a series of explorations of the particular, especially vital contributions of art objects and events, and the forms of experience they engender, to such socio-material assemblages.

4. The locus classicus of such arguments is the work of the anthropologist Steven Feld: see, among others, Feld 1982, 1988, 1994, 1996.

5. For a critical overview of these developments, including an assessment of Bourdieu's contributions to the sociology of art and culture, as well as the limitations of his work, see Born 2010c. Born's article centers, however, on demonstrating the wider significance and fertility of anthropological approaches to music, art, and performance because of their commitment to addressing, in non-reductive ways, the interrelations between their aesthetic, social, and material dimensions.

6. The most interesting alternative to this negative position in Bourdieu's oeuvre is his dialogue with Hans Haacke, in which he engages sympathetically with an artist the subtlety of whose aesthetic and other decisions are inevitably central to the conversation: see Bourdieu and Haacke 1995.

7. See the debate over the proposition "Aesthetics is a cross-cultural category" in Ingold 1996. The debate moves between, on the one hand, a critique of the cultural-historical specificity of Kantian aesthetic discourses and, on the other, the view that the aesthetic can usefully be employed as an analytical category to sensitize anthropologists to the existence (or nonexistence), and the nature, of "emic" discourses concerning form and sensory experience, pleasure and value.

8. The founding text is Bourriaud 2002; see also Kester 2004. Critical responses include Bishop 2004, 2005; Downey 2007; Foster 2006; Martin 2007. Arguably, the kinds of practices gathered under this debate extend, and participate in, a long line of development from the Fluxus-inspired performance art and happenings of the 1960s, in which the lines between artist and audience were blurred and the site and the events and socialities taking place within it became the focus of aesthetic experience: see, among others, Baas 2011; Friedman 1998; Higgins 2002; Rodenbeck 2011.

9. On the art movement that has become known as institutional critique, see Alberro and Stimson 2009; Fraser 2005; Möntmann 2006.

10. The term "social aesthetics" as employed in this volume, and the project for this book, arose from the Improvisation and Social Aesthetics research group set up in 2007 at the start of the Improvisation, Community and Social Practice major research program funded mainly by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council and based at the University of Guelph, the University of British Columbia, and McGill University. The research group was convened by Georgina

Born and included many of the scholars who have contributed to this volume. The conceptual basis of the book was further developed by a conference held at McGill in 2010 at which all the contributors gave papers.

11. In this vein, and symptomatically, Osborne (2013, 116) has recently written about post-conceptual art as "both aesthetic and conceptual" and about conceptual art itself as "the experience of the impossibility/fallacy of the *absolutization* of the anti-aesthetic."

12. It is striking how for some theorists this conclusion—fueled by the burgeoning art history of the 1960s to the 1990s—is unsustainable, even unthinkable, perhaps due to the haunting specter, particularly for those espousing philosophical aesthetics, of sociological reduction. Having worked through certain social features of post-conceptual art, such as its alternative institutionalization and the collectivization of the "artist-function," Osborne (2013, 48), for example, arrives at six "insights" or characteristics that, he argues, constitute the "condition of possibility of a postconceptual art." But none of the six touch on art's social dimensions, even those that Osborne himself has adumbrated. Instead, they dwell on art's "conceptuality," materiality, and "radically distributive" or "irreducibly relational" nature. Rather than re-theorize art's "ineliminable" aesthetic dimension, Osborne ultimately develops a post-Adornian conception of the aesthetic dimension by equating it with art's "materialization," that is, its "felt, spatio-temporal" presentation—where this excludes from feeling, space, and time any social dimension. Indeed, here and elsewhere, for Osborne the "spatial" (in the guise of the geopolitical, or art's transnationalization or globalization) appears to represent an inadequate stand-in, theoretically, for any diagnosis of art's plural social mediations.

13. The term "empractise" is intended to work against any Cartesian fallacy concerning the nature of dialogism, for the dialogical nature of improvised practices cannot be understood in the terms of cognitive processes that "direct" the performing body or the social processes inherent in dialogism. Rather, the dialogism is a matter of how embodied gestures and responses directly put into practice—that is, empractise—processes and interactions that are at once both aesthetic and social.

14. Two extreme theoretical positions concerning the relationship of musical improvisation (directed toward jazz in both cases) to social and political commentary and action, both of which form the loci of major schools of thought on this issue, are Theodor Adorno's writings on jazz and Jacques Attali's *Noise* (1985). For a useful, though not exhaustive, collection of Adorno's writings on jazz, see Adorno 2002a. The two authors form the poles of a continuum that, at one end, portrays jazz as devoid of any political effectiveness due to its commodified and standardized tendencies, and, at the other end, views jazz improvisation as having the potential to model or perform new forms of social and political relation. The essays in this collection, which address improvisation in a number of media, adopt a range of views gathered toward the latter pole while contending emphatically that any analysis of this propensity cannot be culled from a raw ac-

count of improvisation as a technique or practice, but requires consideration of the social and historical conditions within which particular media, genres and acts of improvisation proceed.

15. For a striking analysis of the construction of a hierarchical relation between composition and improvisation in a non-Western classical musical tradition, see Nooshin 2003.

16. While dialogism is foregrounded in group musical improvisations, it is also characteristic of other forms of improvisation—notably, in dance, theater, and performance art: cf. the chapters by Kozel and Svendsen in this volume.

17. For example, while both a free improvisation ensemble and a string quartet require careful acts of listening, responding, and communicating among their members, in the former case responsibility for the sounds produced resides wholly with each member of the ensemble, while in the latter case the responsibility for many aesthetically relevant decisions resides outside the ensemble, with the composer, thereby being predetermined and imposed. For a contrary view, however, see Benson 2003.

18. But for a productive attempt and an overview, see Bailey 1992.

19. Indeed, it is often claimed that Pollock was a fan of Charlie Parker, listening to him while creating his drip paintings. Yet this is inaccurate: Pollock's interest in jazz was limited to trad and Dixieland. Helen Harrison, curator of the Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center, has lectured on this topic (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3H5hPbb3sPg), as well as on the links often drawn between Pollock and jazz.

20. For discussions and developments of musical Platonism, see Dodd 2007; Kivy 1993a, 1993b; Levinson 1990a, 1990b. For a critical discussion of the history of musical Platonism, see Goehr (1992).

21. It is important to note, however, that many types of music—not all of them centered on improvisation—have been subject to neglect in terms of aesthetic analysis because of the primacy accorded by musicology to those musical parameters that can be readily notated in the orthodox score. Musicology has been slow, then, to respond to a series of developments since the 1950s—experimental music, electronic, electroacoustic and computer music, interactive, site-specific, and installation-based sound art, and electronic popular music—in which musical thought and practice focus on timbral, rhythmic, pitch-based, performance, or conceptual gestures that are difficult to capture in orthodox musical notation, where the ontological distinction between music, sound, and environment may be disturbed, and where the creative possibilities of recording and amplification, live performance and installations are brought aesthetically to the fore.

22. For a seminal analysis of this kind of "othering" of improvisation, but with reference to a non-Western classical music tradition, see, again, Nooshin 2003.

23. For a compatible analysis of how music produces meaning, see Born 1993b.

24. For the classic article on this topic, see Walton 1970.

25. For the most extensive discussion of signifying, see Gates 1988.